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SUBJECT: AFGHANISTAN PLEDGES TO ACT PRUDENTLY ON MUSHARRAF

REF: STATE 88734

Classified By: Acting DCM Jim Van Laningham, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Notwithstanding the uncoordinated and unhelpful August 18 comments by Interior Ministry spokesman Zemer Bashary ("Musharraf was not someone good for Afghanistan. We hope that someone good will replace him."), principals in the Palace, the Council of Minister's Secretariat and the Foreign Ministry concurred with reftel's demarche points and pledged to work constructively with the new Pakistani civilian government and to use more care in their public statements.

¶2. (C) Palace spokesman Hamidzada told Public Affairs counselor on August 19 that Karzai and Musharraf spoke by phone earlier that day. The tone was friendly and Karzai reinforced messages consistent with points in our demarche. Hamidzada said he would reiterate in his own public statements Afghanistan's support for a dignified exit and all due respect. Hamidzada characterized the Interior Ministry's statements as "unkind" and "stupid."

¶3. (C) On August 20, Waheed Omar, Deputy DG Office of Administrative Affairs and Council of Minister's Secretariat, confirmed to Polcouns that his Government shared the same view on Musharraf as the USG, as explained in the demarche. He regretted the unhelpful Interior Ministry comments and pledged to work on improving coordination among agencies of the government's message. Omar informed Polcouns that he would soon be named as the director of the Government's new Afghan Media Center whose mandate will be to do just that. Omar said he would speak to Palace spokesman Hamidzada to issue a palace statement that reaffirms Afghanistan's intent to work with Pakistan's civilian government and to speak to Musharraf's resignation "with appropriate respect."

¶4. (C) On August 19, Foreign Ministry Assistant Secretary Khaled Zekriya affirmed to Polcouns that the Government of Afghanistan's position is in line with the USG: it supports the democratically-elected civilian government of Pakistan and agrees the government must turn its attention to the challenges of terrorism and the economy. Although his government is pleased that Musharraf has stepped down, it will treat his departure with dignity.

15. (C) Polcouns gave Zekriya the Secretary's statement and urged his government to consider our tone and approach as it determines how to speak to Musharraf's resignation. Zekriya reiterated there was no difference in view between his government and the United States on the Musharraf resignation and it would take a public posture similar to the USG. He promised to convey the USG position immediately to FM Spanta and the President's office.

WOOD